

Invasive Meningococcal Disease (IMD) Fact Sheet

What is Invasive Meningococcal Disease (IMD)?

Invasive meningococcal disease (IMD) is a rare but serious illness caused by bacteria. IMD can cause people to become very ill and can result in death, brain damage, hearing loss, or kidney failure. Seek immediate medical care if you develop the symptoms listed below. Early diagnosis and prompt treatment with antibiotics is key.

What are the symptoms of IMD?

IMD may cause meningitis (swelling of the lining of the brain and spinal cord). Meningitis symptoms include sudden onset of fever, headache, and stiff neck. Nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, and confusion can also occur. IMD can also cause infection of the blood. Symptoms of infection of the blood may include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, cold hands and feet, chills, severe muscle aches or stomach pain, rapid breathing, diarrhea, and a rash. If you develop these symptoms, you should immediately seek medical care, by calling 911 or going to the nearest emergency room.

How is IMD spread?

IMD is spread from person-to-person through droplets of nasal mucus or saliva. Close contact—such as kissing or contact with saliva, intimate or sexual contact, someone sneezing or coughing in your face, living or staying in a crowded space together, or sharing drinks, cigarettes, or eating utensils — can cause the disease to spread. Close physical encounters, including sex, may transmit infection.

It is NOT spread by breathing the air where a person with the disease has been.

How can I protect myself from Invasive Meningococcal Disease?

Meningococcal vaccine is the best way to protect yourself from IMD. Vaccine may begin to provide protection 7 to 10 days after vaccination. If you are HIV-infected you need to get a second dose of the vaccine at least 8 weeks after the first dose.

Vaccination is not 100% effective in preventing IMD. To reduce your risk of contracting meningococcal disease, consider avoiding contact with saliva (spit), phlegm, nasal mucus, or other fluids from the nose or mouth of other people.

Should I get vaccinated with meningococcal vaccine?

All HIV-infected people, age 2 months and older should receive meningococcal vaccine.

In addition, since there have been recent outbreaks of IMD among gay men and other men who have sex with men in several US cities, the San Francisco Department of Public Health recommends that gay and bisexual men, transgender persons and other men who have sex with men consider getting vaccinated against meningococcal disease. People at higher risk include those who have close or sexual contact with multiple partners or who regularly visit crowded venues such as bars or parties or who smoke cigarettes, marijuana, or illegal drugs.

If you have questions, contact your health care provider or visit www.sfcdcp.org/meningococcal.

